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ABSTRACT

The reading act and the teaching of black children should not be treated as incidental by either white or black educators. The role of teacher-training institutions should be to instruct future teachers in the reading processes, reading readiness stages, basal reading programs, formal and informal reading tests, black dialects, reading approaches, and cultural backgrounds and heritage. The duties of the administrator and teacher should include proper assessment of children and preplanned instruction. The black community should also be involved, exploring specific criteria, such as tests which have a direct bearing upon black children's reading achievement, or determining whether there is any action parents should take to help children improve their reading skills. (HOD)

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PREPARING TO ASSIST BLACK CHILDREN IN THE READING ACT

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PREPARING TO ASSIST BLACK CHILDREN IN THE READING ACT

With the riots of the mid sixties and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 came a cry that said, in essence, "Black children are not being taught to read efficiently." The question that was continually raised by teachers and school administrators is "What is wrong with these (Black) children?" For it was and still is in many cases believed that reading deficiency among Black children is caused by an inferior language and a disadvantaged socio-economic environment.

It is opined that neither teachers nor school administrators have assessed themselves thoroughly to find out if they, not only possess the necessary skills required to teach Black children to read, but do properly instruct Black children in the reading act. Additionally, teacher-training institutions must continually evaluate their programs in order to determine their ability to properly train teachers to teach reading. Since many teachers are apparently not trained properly in teacher-training institutions, school administrators may have no alternative but to hire ill-prepared teachers to teach Black children and the result is that the children do not learn to read efficiently because they have not been properly instructed.

Not only do Black children have to content with improper instruction but they often find themselves labeled negatively.

It is known that Black children are labeled as non-readers or deficient readers more often than whites. A perusal of the literature on the disadvantaged reader will support this fact. Further, there is a startling trend in the literature to capitalize on events considered to be "negativism" in the Black child's environment, causing Black children to appear as if they are intellectually inferior and/or incapable of learning to read. But, the readers of this literature should bear in mind that the writers of most of this literature are dominate culture individuals. These individuals, apparently, don't care, or, are not aware of the damaging effects this highlighted "negativism" is having on the academic development of Black children. Unfortunately, much of this literature has caused many teachers to adhere to the deficit-model when instructing Black children.

Being cognizant of the above, teacher-training institutions, school administrators and teachers and the Black community must become responsive to the educational needs of Black children. Specifically, 1) What role should teacher-training institutions play in teaching Black children to read? 2) What should be the responsibility of school administrators and teachers in teaching Black children to read? 3) How may the Black community function in teaching and/or reinforcing reading skills for Black children?

ROLE OF TEACHER-TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

One role of teacher-training institutions is to adequately prepare teachers to instruct children in different content

areas in various educational settings. Presently, there is an illusion that teachers are adequately prepared by teacher-training institutions to instruct all ethnic groups of children in reading and other such content areas as mathematics, social studies, music, science. This is an erroneous assumption for they are not. They are fairly well prepared to instruct children from the dominate group; training rarely exceeds this orientation.

In all of the content areas, reading is imperative. Teachers, therefore, must teach reading when instructing in the content areas. This is a strategy which is often ignored by content area teachers. With this in mind, the writer is suggesting that all content area teachers-in-training be required to take at least a three-hour course in reading methodology. And, for those teachers-in-training who will be required to teach reading as part of their responsibility in the school curriculum, take at least six-credit hours of reading methodology and diagnosis.

While the content-area teachers preparation may be survey oriented, it should ensure that these teachers-in-training are knowledgable in such competencies as the reading process, various readiness stages, basal reader programs, formal and informal tests, language differences and reading approaches. In addition, it should provide for reading and reacting to some of the literature about reading. The teachers-in-training, whose responsibility it will be to teach reading should have a

working knowledge of the above-noted competencies. Furthermore, they should observe teachers in practice, critique those practices, diagnose children's reading strengths and needs and teach lessons.

More specifically, the teachers-in-training should know that the reading process involves the integrating of many skills and abilities. Gates' writing in 1949 very clearly pointed out this integrating of skills and abilities when he noted that the reading process or reading:

> ...is not a simple mechanical skill, nor is it a narrow scholastic tool. Properly cultivated, it is essentially a thoughtful process...It can and should embrace all types of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning and problem-solving. Indeed it is believed that reading is one of the best media for cultivating many techniques of thinking and imagining. The reading program should, therefore, make careful provision for contributing as fully as possible to the cultivation of a whole array of techniques involved in understanding, thinking, reflecting, imagining, judging, evaluating, analysing and reasoning.

Teachers-in-training should keep Gates' statement in mind as they seek to formulate a workable or functional understanding of reading in their particular setting.

Additionally, teachers-in-training should know that the readiness stages for learning should include the physical, mental, social and emotional development of children. Since the understanding of the total development of the child as it relates to the readiness stages for learning is basic information for teachers-in-training, separate explanatory comments about each stage will follow: First, it should be noted that the child's total physical health is essential to his learning. Thus, while noting the importance of

vision and hearing Bush and Huebner (1970) stated:

> ...In order that he may succeed in learning to read the child must focus on words and a line of print, move along a line, make return sweeps to the next line, change focus, note similarities and differences, recognize figure-ground relationships, and concentrate visually...
> .....
> Hearing is one of the senses that is important for the reading process. When the child confuses the phonemes he hears, he cannot correctly form the phoneme-grapheme relationships. His response will usually reflect this difficulty.

In addition to vision and hearing, the teachers-in-training should be cognizant of such things as low energy levels, physical fatigue, nervous tension, speech and eye-hand coordination.

Second, the mental aspect is generally interpreted to mean the intellectual or potential level as measured by intelligence tests which report intelligence quotients (IQ). Teachers-in-training should not be mislead by IQ's. IQ's do not predict potential nor an intelligence level for children. The teachers-in-training should also note that mental aspects may refer to skills such as attention span, visual discrimination, auditory discrimination and may include such activities as listening to and retelling stories, making inferences, demonstrating left to right sequence and showing an interest in words, stories and books.

Another readiness stage is social. The social aspects may refer to children working and sharing materials in learning and in playing settings. Also social readiness should take note of the child's self-reliance and

his ability to interact with the teacher and peers at specified times.

Lastly, the child's emotional status must be considered by the teachers-in-training. Tinker and McCollough (1968) pointed out that:

> ...Inadequate emotional stability, insufficient self-reliance, and inability to cooperate may handicap a child in his efforts to learn to read. However, it has been shown again and again that a child with symptoms of emotional maladjustment need not necessarily fail in reading. In fact many such children learn to read well.

Knowledge of these readiness stages will provide the teachers-in-training with clearer pictures of the children who will be placed in their classrooms. It is important to note that one should not wait until all of the readiness stages are fully developed before instructing children in reading because learning to read will often help children to overcome some of the difficulties which they may be experiencing.

In addition to the readiness stages, basal reader programs may be reviewed, analyzed and/or compared by teachers-in-training by responding to items such as the following:

1. What are the objectives of the program?
2. Does the teacher's guide appropriately outline the lessons to be taught as well as make provisions for individual differences?
3. What are the suggested procedures for teaching stories?
4. Which word recognition skills and comprehension skills are presented?

5. Does the program provide enough new words per story?
6. Is the subject matter covered in the program appropriate to childrens' strengths, needs, background and interests? How?
7. Does the program provide a balanced mixture of ethnic groups, professions, sex and socio-economic levels?
8. Does the program present a variety of literary styles and forms?
9. Are the illustrations in the program suitable for the content presented?
10. Are the materials attractive and durable?

After responding to the above items, the teachers-in-training will have a fairly good knowledge of a basal reading program. The real understanding and acceptance or rejection of a program will be determined through its use, its discussion with peers and through further reading about the program.

Just as an understanding of basal reader programs is essential, formal and informal tests are, too, an important part of the teacher-training program. In schools children are usually tested with standardized and informal tests, not assessed. Teachers-in-training must recognize the impact and realize the effect these tests are having on children's academic development. In an effort to assist teachers-in-training as well as other educators who give tests with this matter, Scales and Smith (1974) suggested that all test givers:

> ...first assess self and question the reason for testing, the environmental makeup of testing facilities, the emotional conditions under which pupils are forced to function, the use of test results, the resources that should be explored before administering tests, and how the raw

> results should be interpreted. Secondly, the tester should analyze his thinking about minorities in view of broad assumptions generally made by the majority populace... Thirdly, an investigation... [should be made] of standardized tests to pinpoint social consequence...

If teachers-in-training are to be responsible to children, they must recognize the imperfection of tests. Chall (1958) asserted that:

> ...Standardized reading tests designed for a few grades frequently give a distorted picture of reading achievement, particularly at the extremes among the poorest and best readers...if students are significantly retarded or advanced for their grade, they will be unable to reveal their true achievement levels.

Another important area, the Language (black dialects) spoken by many Black children is merely mentioned, at best, in teacher-training programs. Usually, no intellectual attention will be given to this topic because of the myths that follow the language and the seemingly, don't care attitude, about Black children. Much has been written about the language system of Blacks. Unfortunately, not enough of the literature states that the language system of Blacks is a highly developed one. That it, as we know it today, began to develop in the mid-seventeenth century and was probably facilitated by earlier creolization of other African and European languages, especially Black Portuguese. Black Portuguese is Portuguese Creole. Portuguese Creole is the meshing of vocabulary from the Portuguese language with the syntax and phonology of African languages (Taylor, 1971). To be sure, all languages and/or dialects have their peculiar vocabularies, syntax and phonology.

One way of sensitizing teachers-in-training to their beliefs about the dialects of Blacks is to have them discuss

their feelings and beliefs about the various dialects through an informally prepared instrument. The instrument may be composed of the following sixteen items which the teachers-in-training will have to respond to by writing yes, no or undecided before discussion.

1. Black dialects are substandard for communication._____
2. Black dialects are inferior speech. _____
3. Blacks should not speak in a dialect in formal settings._____
4. White teachers do not understand Black dialects. _____
5. Black dialects should not be included in the regular school curriculum. _____
6. Black children should be corrected continually, if they speak in a dialect. _____
7. Black children should be taught to read in a Black dialect. _____
8. Books should be written in a Black dialect for Black children._____
9. White teachers should become knowledgeable about the use of Black dialects. _____
10. The study of Black dialects should be a part of teacher training programs. _____
11. White children should understand that Black dialects are communicable forms of speech. _____
12. Blacks should never speak in a dialect when applying for a job. _____
13. The dialects of Black children have caused them to be less verbal than white children. _____

14. Only Blacks speak with a dialect. _____

15. Teachers should not become concerned when a Black child reads "too" for "tool", "pass" for "past" and "roof" for "Ruth". _____

16. The educational levels of Blacks can be determined by their speech. _____

After responding to the items, the teachers-in-training should be directed to group themselves into groups of four or five. Next, they should discuss their responses with the understanding of no right or wrong answers. This instrument was designed to facilitate discussions about their beliefs. Following the discussions in-depth readings about the language system of Blacks by such noted educators as Johnson (1969), Taylor (1971), Smith (1972) and Williams (1976) should be recommended. These readings will provide a substantive orientation for the arguments generated during the discussion.

There are many reading approaches and methods available for those engaged in the teaching of reading. Teachers-in-training should become knowledgeable about such approaches as: linguistic approach, language experience approach, individualized approach, basal reader approach and phonics, as well as the kinesthetic and Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA) methods.

Commercial reading programs generally take precedence in defining approaches and methods. One reason for this may be that there is disagreement among persons in reading who have defined the approaches and methods. However, for functional purposes and brevity the aforementioned approaches may be

defined as:

1. Linguistic Approach utilizes spelling or decoding symbols to teach reading. Meaning tends not to be emphasized.
2. Language Experience Approach utilizes the child's experiences to teach reading. The child's background is the basis for this approach.
3. Individualized Approach utilizes the child's interest to teach reading. This approach assumes that the child has an interest; based on this interest the child will select some material to read. Finally, the child will read the material at his own pace.
4. Basal Reader Approach utilizes commerical programs encompassing many approaches to teaching reading. The essential elements of the commercial programs are: a teacher's manual, a textbook and a workbook for the child.
5. Phonics Approach utilizes the sound-symbol relationship. It assumes that when the sounds of symbols are known, the child can blend the sounds into words.
6. Kinesthetic Method utilizes the sense of touch. Words are constructed from a textured material such as sandpaper; the child traces over the word, then writes the word. Feeling words in this manner is suppose to aid the child in learning to read.
7. Initial Teaching Alphabet utilizes the sound-symbol and experience technique in presenting reading skills. There are forty-four characters in ITA; of the forty-four characters, twenty-four are identified as traditional orthography. These characters are used solely by the child in his reading and writing rather than the twenty-six letters which are

referred to as traditional orthography. Also, the child's experiences are used extensively to develop his reading skills.

There are many other approaches and methods used in reading instruction of which the teachers-in-training may become cognizant. Some are: Programmed Reading; Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile (VAKT); Words in color; and the Diacritical Marking System (DMS). Of the numerous approaches and methods available for teachers to choose from, there appears to be no one best approach to use in teaching reading. An eclectic approach is underscored as the most effective way to teach reading. In addition, the literature tends to support the notion, that the inclusion of sound-symbol strategies with any approach tends to produce independent readers sooner.

It is further recognized that the cultural heritage of Black children is a significant part of their educational development. Therefore, factors from their heritage should be incorporated into the curriculum which purport to teach them to read (Landeck, 1975). Success has been noted when this technique was applied. Teacher-training programs in the past have virtually ignored this tactic. They have emphasized language experience, meant to encourage the cultural aspect, and generally left it up to the teachers-in-training to pursue this technique in the classroom. In an effort to support teacher training, Scales and Smith (1975) have made the following suggestions as means of improving teacher-training programs in teacher-training institutions.

> ...Their programs should include provisions for: (1) providing experiences for students in local communities with persons who display a culture different from their own; this experience may be implemented through local community initiated programs and the local schools, (2) academically studying the group(s) under consideration; there should be planned study guides, discussions and interactions with persons of other cultures, (3) constructing projects that may delineate or express to peers the knowledge level attained in a given culture, and (4) allotting the student time, guidance, and support in developing a factual activity...for critical evaluation as to its worth in understanding that culture.

These suggestions, when utilized in a practicum setting will provide the teachers-in-training with some basic experience and knowledge about other cultures. Further, these experiences will be of value for, not only teaching children from a number of minority cultural backgrounds but, teaching children from the dominate cultural background.

Teacher-training institutions must become increasingly responsible to the needs of training teachers, especially those teachers who are preparing to teach reading to Black and other minority children. Their programs must encompass the competencies noted earlier. Surely then, school administrators will be more certain of hiring properly prepared teachers to instruct Black children in reading.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

School administrators are responsible for the basic operation of the school. Their duties are vast and demanding. They range from such things as: custodial concerns to instruction, confrontation to intervention, student consultations

to parent conferences. Duties of teachers are extensive in that they include the total learning environment for children. Indeed the educational gamut is covered. Within this educational gamut are some specified areas which school administrators and teachers must monitor very closely. These areas are the assessment and the instruction which children receive.

First, assessment of children is fundamental. However, children are generally tested in schools, not assessed. That means that children take standardized tests which were probably selected by the administration and administered by the teacher. Next, the tests are scored according to test directions and the children are statistically ranked. Assessment in schools must mean an appraisal of the child's present knowledge. This appraisal may be determined with the aid of informal commercial measures (tests), teacher-made measures and standardized measures. The most important measure should be determined by the objective devised for administering the measure initially. For example, if the devised objective was to determine word recognition and comprehension reading levels for children in their basal reader texts, the best measure would be a teacher-made textbook measure. The teacher-made is preferred because it can be devised from material which the children will be reading. Consequently, there will be no need to guess about possible correlation between the devised measure and the basal text; this is assuming, of course, that the material of the text is sequenced and graduated in difficulty.

Second, instruction which children receive should be

well thought out and planned prior to instruction. The teacher's plans should be made based on prior assessment of children's strengths and weaknesses. For example, if it is founded that five children in a third grade classroom are in need of instruction in prefixes and suffixes, the teacher may outline a teaching strategy as follows:

A. Grade: Third

B. Group Size: Five children

C. Time: 20 minutes

D. Materials: word lists, passages from texts, pencils

E. Skill: prefixes and suffixes

F. Objective(s):

The students will be given a list of twenty words plus passages containing at least twenty prefixes and suffixes. They will be instructed to identify and circle at least 85% of the prefixes and suffixes in the word list. Further, they will be instructed to read the passages and underline at least 85% of the words containing prefixes and/or suffixes.

G. Procedures/Learning Activities

1. The teacher will lead the students into a discussion on prefixes and suffixes. Specifically, they will discuss the importance of knowing and recognizing prefixes and suffixes while reading.
2. The teacher will have prepared a list of twenty mimeographed words taken from the students' social studies and reading texts. Next, the students will

discuss and circle all of the prefixes and suffixes which they can find in the word list.

3. The teacher will have prepared mimeographed passages taken from the students' reading text. The students will be directed to read and underline all words containing prefixes and suffixes in the passages. Next, the students and teacher will discuss the importance of prefixes and suffixes in those passages.

H. Assessment: Paper and Pencil

A mimeographed passage of about 150 words with blank lines in lieu of prefixes and suffixes for many of the words will be given to the students. A number of prefixes and suffixes will be randomly listed on the chalkboard. The students will be directed to read the passage, read the prefixes and suffixes from the chalkboard, then fill in the blank spaces with the appropriate prefixes and suffixes. Mastery is 90%.

This particular teaching strategy outline, if used, will ensure the necessary steps for efficient planning. It also provides a practical guide for the teacher to use while teaching as well as assessing the learning of children after the lesson. Successful instruction, then, requires that teachers plan their lessons accurately, implement them in an interesting manner and assess the children's achievement at the end of the lesson.

READING AND THE BLACK COMMUNITY

As indicated earlier, professional educators should be held technically responsible for teaching Black children to read. But, the Black community is part of this paradign and should share in the responsibilities. The Black community may entertain several options in preparing to facilitate reading improvement for Black children. Scales and Smith (1976) suggested "...that parents, school personnel and the community work together,...to develop and to promote reading programs." They further proposed some organizing strategies for community persons interested in organizing themselves around a common goal. The strategies suggested that:

(1) The PTA should contact other community agencies and businesses...to inform them of the need to establish a reading program in their community.

.....

(2) The PTA should [actively] solicit interest from [them]...

.....

(3) ...three persons--one from [each group]...should schedule a meeting...

.....

(4) The agenda for the meeting should include such broad items as: the reading levels of children in the community, a discussion on how the reading levels are detemined, an overview of the school curriculum, a discussion of the assessment procedure in the school...

.....

(5) During the meeting a definite decision should be made as to which items should be pursued immediately. These items should be listed as objectives with short-ranged goals...

Following the organizing of the groups, the community may explore specific criteria, such as testing and tests which have direct bearing upon Black children's achievement in reading. For example, certain members of the community

may come together and contrive a situation for discussion. This discussion may help the group learn how to deal with real life situations. For starters they may delienate an eighth grade child's tests scores and conclusions might be drawn from diagnostic reading and IQ tests. This information may be presented as follows: First, the score for the diagnostic reading test may be reported by sub-test scores in stanines. They may be: literal comprehension - 5, inferential comprehension - 3, vocabulary - 7, long and short vowel sounds - 1, blending of sounds - 2, prefixes and suffixes - 2 and speed reading - 2. Second, the IQ score may be reported as 79. Third, a conclusion that might be made about this eighth grade child is "that his reading is below grade level and his IQ indicates that he is probably retarded. His parents should be happy that he has achieved this much and should not expect a great deal from him."

Given this information, the community group should attempt to determine whether anything has been omitted from the conclusion and if there is any action which the parents should take in order to help the child improve his reading skills. Because the community group probably will not be skilled in analyzing tests, they may essay to develop questions for the parents to discuss with the teacher. Some questions may be: 1) How will the tests scores be used? 2) Who will have access to the scores? Why? 3) What does stanine mean? 4) What does literal and inferential comprehension mean? 5) How will the scores help my child? 6) Will the scores hurt him later in school? 7) What can I do to help my child? Answers to these questions will provide parents with some useful

information.

Community persons must come together and discuss issues and concerns that deal directly with the reading achievement of Black children. Further, they must make some concrete plans which call for questioning present school practices as well as working cooperatively with the school. At best, Black children will profit from these endeavors.

CONCLUSION

The reading act and Black children should not be considered as incidental in the world of academe among neither white nor Black educators. Neither should this important tool, reading, be overlooked in the Black community. The writer has presented some ideas and expectations for those educators who are responsible for teaching reading to Black children. Also, some directions in this matter for the Black community were noted. Practicing the ideas presented will not necessarily be simple, nor easy, but they will provide Black children with some reading survival skills.

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